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Volume Eleven  
Number Three  
June 2001

# Breaking Ground

## 2001 Youth Leadership Forum Class Selected

*By Ned Andrew Solomon*



STATE PHOTOGRAPHIC SERVICES

**T**he 2001 Youth Leadership Forum class participants have been selected, and by the time this issue hits the street, they will be 2001 YLF graduates!

Faced with a stack of outstanding applications, sophisticated and inspirational essays, and passionate letters of recommendation, our review team had the daunting task of creating a class that would be diverse in disability, gender, ethnicity, and geographic region, and whose members exhibited, or

had the potential to exhibit, leadership qualities in their communities. Narrowing this superlative group down to a class of 20 was one of the most difficult things any of us have had to do!

For those of you unfamiliar with YLF, it is a training initiative of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. The Forum is designed to provide 10th, 11th, and 12th grade high school students who have disabilities with information about disability issues,

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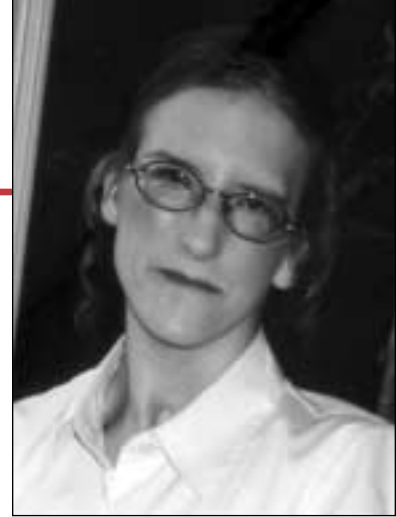
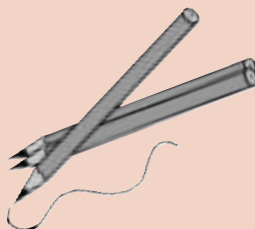
## 2

and to help them become advocates for themselves, and for others in their communities.

The four-day conference takes place on the Vanderbilt University campus in Nashville. The students, or delegates as we call them, participate in small and large group discussions, listen to local and national speakers in the field of disabilities, travel to Legislative Plaza to tour the Capitol and meet with legislators, attend a mentor luncheon at the Doubletree Hotel, and complete written materials that are designed to augment their self-advocacy and leadership skills. Curriculum includes state and federal laws, assistive technology, community inclusion, employment, education, history of disability and independent living. In addition, delegates take part in a photography workshop and a talent show.

We are pleased to present the stellar class scheduled to attend this year's Youth Leadership Forum, Monday, June 4 through Thursday, June 7:

Melissa Allen—Memphis, TN  
Christina Barlow—Mt. Juliet, TN  
Chrissy Billante—Brentwood, TN  
Kourtney Blevins—Greeneville, TN  
Nelson Caudill—Thornhill, TN  
Caroline Ellington—Germantown, TN  
Jessica Greer—Collierville, TN  
Benjamin Harmon—Johnson City, TN  
Bryan Hilbert—Friendsville, TN  
Darnykka Hillsman—Waverly, TN  
Laurie Hobson—Memphis, TN  
Kristy Millican—Germantown, TN  
Breka Moore—Humboldt, TN  
Daphne O'Brien—Memphis, TN  
Nathan Pugh—Germantown, TN  
Allison Ragsdale—Lenoir City, TN  
Marshelle Rolle—Ashland City, TN  
Sarah Schide—Ooltewah, TN  
Stephanie Shultz—Sweetwater, TN  
Justin Stauffer—Watauga, TN



Caroline Ellington

A staff of ten adult volunteers with and without disabilities support and supervise the delegates, lead the small group discussions, and in general, keep this exciting program running.

We are proud to showcase excerpts from a few of the essays submitted by our accepted delegates. ■

### BY CAROLINE ELLINGTON

I am a 17-year-old junior at Houston High School in Germantown, Tennessee. I was born with Moebius Cycle syndrome. Very rare, it entails a cranial nerve palsy (which means I can't use the muscles in my face and neck) and a disruption in the development of extremities. I have only one full arm and hand. My left arm ends just above the elbow, and my legs end just above the knees. I have prostheses that I use occasionally, but I am really more comfortable just as I am.

I have had the opportunity to see the world through a different position—usually from a wheelchair. I see people from a viewpoint that many others don't have. I have also lived my life being seen wrongly; people tend to believe that because I am physically handicapped I am also mentally handicapped. The stares, glares, and silly questions have only made me more determined to be out there where everyone is—McDonalds, the mall, the movies, skating rinks, dances.

When I was five years old, I was at the mall with my mother and two sisters. Some

kids came up to me, staring and touching me, and commenting that I didn't have any legs or feet. I told them I did have legs and feet and that I could take them off at night.

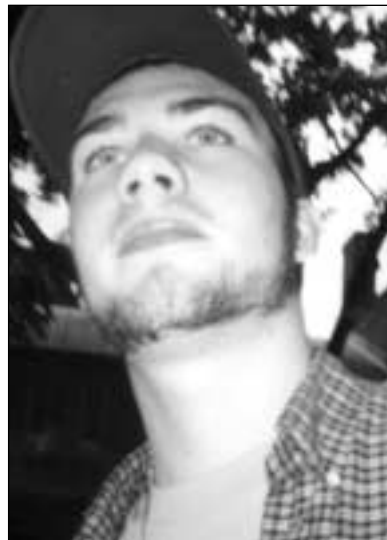
A friend and I went to a haunted house in a public park in Germantown a few years ago. We were both in wheelchairs. As we went through the haunted house, everyone cleared the way for us to pass. They also acted as if we weren't there at all. When they tried to scare all the other kids and not us, we were very upset. We had to sit on the side while everyone else got to experience fun and scary pranks.

I have experienced discrimination like this due to the fact that I am different. Because of this I would like to be a voice to help educate others that "different" doesn't mean bad or dangerous. Since I don't see myself as handicapped, I don't feel good about others seeing me that way.

#### BY BENJAMIN HARMAN

I was diagnosed with a learning disability in the third grade, and have been dealing with my disability ever since. I am now a 10th grader at University School in Johnson City, Tennessee. University School is a year-round school, with grades K-12, located on the campus of East Tennessee State University.

A learning disability can be very frustrating, and often the student has a feeling of inadequacy. I have had both positive and negative experiences, and those have contributed in shaping who I have become. I think it is important to meet others who have had the same struggles and triumphs that I have experienced. Through the sharing of experiences and ideas, we may be able to assist each other in dealing with our disability.



Benjamin Harman

Many people have had a positive influence on me. Shane Roberts was my guitar teacher for two years. I can't say that I learned much about playing the guitar, but the discussions we had were invaluable to me. Shane was the first adult to discuss issues with me on a grown-up level. We talked about religion and politics, and even when we did not see eye to eye we respected each other's position.

Another influential person in my life is a teacher of mine at University School. I first met Ms Barfield in Resource Math class in the 7th grade. During the first week of class she assigned me several math problems to do in class. Unfortunately, she walked away with my pencil, so I just sat staring at a blank page. Eventually, she noticed my lack of action and returned to offer assistance. I told her, in a meek way, that she had my pencil. She looked at me and said, "Ben Harman, if you don't learn anything else this year, you are going to learn how to speak up." Ms Barfield has been there for me ever since, giving direction and offering encouragement.

Although I am only 15 years old, I have chosen a career in the ministry. Not only is it difficult to be a student with learning disabilities, it is difficult to be a student and be a Christian. But the confident self-image that I have developed through dealing with my learning disability has helped me to grow into a self-assured young man. Recently, on Youth Sunday, I delivered the sermon at my church. I know without people like Ms Barfield and Mr. Roberts, and the strength

I gained from struggling with my disability, I would not have been able to stand before a crowd and calmly deliver my sermon.

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BY DARNYKKA HILLSMAN

Although not listed as my primary disability, I have a severe asthmatic condition that has always been a significant obstacle in my life. When I was two, I experienced an attack so severe that I actually died. The doctors were able to revive me, but they said I could never live a normal life. I was never able to run and play like other children.

When I was 11 years old, I had another serious episode. I wanted to ride a bike like other kids. My friends were going to ride their bikes to a place a mile away. When they took off, I went with them. Going there

didn't bother me, but on the way back I started having an attack. I fell further and further behind my friends. They were laughing and happy and didn't notice me. I soon blacked out. When my friends got

home, my family realized I was in trouble. They came and found me on the ground and took care of me until I could breathe again.

Although this was six years ago, I still remember the fear I felt. I am doing better now and can walk and ride a bike without too much discomfort.

What I have learned from this is to have compassion for others with disabilities. I think I may have had the challenges



Darnykka Hillsman

I have faced so that I can help others. I can also help persons without a disability to understand what it feels like for someone who does.

My plans after graduation from Waverly Central High School are to become a cosmetologist and start a day care center for children. These are the things I enjoy the most. I never get tired of making others beautiful or interacting with young children.

When I do my friends' hair, I enjoy creating new styles that complement their facial features. Many things make me feel stressed out or tired but not when I am helping people feel pretty.

Working with children is much the same. They have so much to say if you listen to them. They can run and play all day if you let them. I like to read to little children. They enjoy fairy tales and cartoons. I relate to them because I was the same as a young child, and I haven't forgotten. ■

If you would like more information about YLF, or would like a delegate or volunteer staff application for the 2002 Class, please contact me at:

**Ned Andrew Solomon**

Director, YLF

Tennessee Council on

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425 5th Avenue, North

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(615) 741-4562 (TTY)





# "What's So Special About Special Ed?"

By Mary Pfeiger

I am the mother of four girls. Laura is my youngest daughter. She is 18 years old and has Down syndrome. She attends an inner-city high school and is in the 11th grade. When Laura was in the 9th grade at this school, she came home one day and said, "Mom, I think I am pregnant." Evidently another student had pointed out to her that she had a little pouch of a stomach and that's what that meant. Under normal circumstances this kind of news would cause great concern and worry. My response that day was one of amusement. I had to bite my lip very hard not to laugh in front of her. It may sound strange, but I was grateful that she was learning these real life issues in a real environment because of her inclusive participation in general education classes. It presented me with a great opportunity to discuss sex education and personal safety once again.

Although there are risks out there in the world for our children who are more vulnerable because of their disabilities, how will my daughter ever learn to negotiate those risks by being isolated from them? How is she going to learn how to follow directions, be punctual, do some things she doesn't want to do, cooperate with her fellow workers, and figure out how to socialize in the workplace if she never has the opportunity to learn those skills in school?

So, what is so special about special education? I think special education is just too special. It breaks my heart to see students being warehoused in supposed "life skills" or segregated classrooms when they could easily spend at least part of their day in a typical class. The special education class should serve only as a resource that supports them. The child should not leave the segregated class to get inclusion; instead, she should

leave the general education classroom to get support. Many school systems are in the process of reforming their ideas about special education, but others have a long way to go.

The other problem is that expectations are very low for students in special education. As a child grows up, she may take on that stigma that attaches to special education and begin to believe it is who she is. My daughter learned the capitals of all the states when she was included in a typical fifth grade class because all the other children were learning them. She would not have been expected to learn this type of information in a segregated setting.

In special settings there is not motivation to learn because there appears to be no purpose to it. Typical peers are great motivators and give purpose to learning, and usually the child rises to the higher level of expectation in the typical classroom.

I am not saying that all children need to be included all the time; I do believe in a continuum of services. But most children can be included more than they are right now if they have adequate supports provided to them.

I propose that we change the term "special education" to "supported education." That term more accurately describes the intent of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. IDEA never implied education for children with disabilities as special or separate but rather as a system of aids and supports that go with a child into settings that are as unrestrictive as possible. I hope that we stop thinking of special education as a place and begin thinking of it as resources and supports that follow a student to help them toward success. ■

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Mary Pfeiger is chair of the Education and Disability Advisory Council of Davidson County, a founding member of Special Education Action Network, and a founding member of the Disability Coalition on Education. She delivered these remarks at the Kennedy Center's "Occasional Conversation" on January 30, 2001.

# Community Cares about Kids (and the Kid in You)

By Leslie Ann Daniels

Observing children, youth, and adults with special needs expressing themselves through the creative arts has been a joyous learning experience. Our society tends to measure a successful program by words of appreciation from the participants, a big happy smile, or a warm embrace. But after working with many people with special needs, one realizes that a gesture, a moment of eye contact, or a repeated thrust of a hand demonstrates as much joy, excitement, and appreciation as any hug can!

Community Cares about Kids began as a seed planted in the warm earth while I worked as a special education teacher at the Psychiatric Hospital at Vanderbilt. This seed, encouraged by the laughter and joy of children experiencing creative expression, blossomed and developed into a garden of beautiful and exotic flowers.

Community Cares about Kids (and the Kid in You) develops and provides individualized creative art and music programs to the special needs community. Each program is unique and based on interest, aptitude, and cognitive and physical ability. We go on site to schools, centers, private homes—anywhere there is a group of adults, youth, or children with special needs. We form partnerships only with experienced professional artists, musicians, performers, and educators. Our programs often culminate in a gallery

opening, a puppet show, or theater performance for the participants' friends, family, and special invitees. We provide programs in the Technical Arts (video production, photography), music arts (studio recording), expressive arts (writing, poetry), visual arts (painting, drawing, sculpture), performance art (puppet design and performance, set design and theater performance), and movement arts (dancing, movement).

Community Cares about Kids (and the Kid in You) also offers a Hobby, Auto, and Home Maintenance program. We are pleased to present the following workshops: Basic Car Maintenance and Repair, Basic Electrical Work for Homes, Basic Plumbing, Wood Working, Gardening, Furniture Design and Construction, and Printmaking.

We are ready to begin our Job Club program for people with special needs. This 4-6 week program was developed from my fifteen years of experience assisting people with disabilities to find and hold employment. I am a Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and Disability Analyst. The program includes: Informational Interviewing, Job Seeking Skills Workshop, On-the-Job Training Programs, Job Coaching, Service Learning, Job Development, Placement, and Follow-up.

Our programs, which are sustained by fees and individual contributions, help us provide free Creative Arts classes to at-risk youth in special education, as well as, support local professional artists. For further information about classes and workshops, please contact Leslie Daniels, Program Director, Community Cares about Kids, (615) 297-8802. ■

Photo Below:  
Enjoying flower  
art at Harris  
Hillman Special  
Education.



# DCE Tackles Special Education Issues

By Ned Andrew Solomon

**T**he Disability Coalition on Education (DCE) is an alliance of organizations, agencies, and individuals dedicated to supporting and improving the education of students with disabilities in Tennessee. Its mission is to create partnerships among families, schools, and communities to ensure that all students, with and without disabilities, receive quality education.

Parents, educators, and representatives from many organizations, including The Arc of Tennessee, The Arc of Davidson County, Tennessee Voices for Children, SPAN-TN, the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, STEP, Tennessee Protection and Advocacy, and the Tennessee Disability Coalition, meet monthly to discuss important special education issues.

A few of the topics currently on the table are

- how the Governor's new Reading Initiative will affect special education students,
- how the special education funding formula works and whether it is truly working for our children,
- if the current administrative complaint process is effective, fair, and accurate, especially in terms of tracking the numbers of complaints being registered in particular school districts throughout the state.

Often, the DCE will move beyond the discussion phase and take action in the form of writing letters, generating widespread



community involvement, directly contacting legislators, and serving on committees, education boards, or task forces. Case in point: In 2000-01, the State Department of Education began the process of drafting state regulations for the reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The DCE organized work groups to make specific recommendations for the new state regulations, reviewing word-by-word the old state regulations and the newly reauthorized federal law. The process was comprehensive, consumer-driven, and reflected input of families across the state. Professional agencies worked with families in researching models of regulations provided by the federal Department of Education and other states, and in drafting proposed language to be considered by the State Department of Education. Many important additions were made thanks to the DCE effort.

The monthly meetings are open to anyone interested in special education issues. The next two meetings will take place on June 27 and July 25, 11 a.m.-2 p.m. at the Tennessee Protection and Advocacy Nashville offices, 2416 21st Avenue South, Suite 100. If you are planning to attend a meeting, please let Shirley Shea know in advance, at (615) 298-1080.

If you are interested in getting regular updates about DCE happenings and general special education information, please send an e-mail message to [nsolomon@mail.state.tn.us](mailto:nsolomon@mail.state.tn.us). The members of the DCE look forward to expanding the alliance to involve more concerned individuals, and to better serve our children with disabilities in educational settings. ■

Ned Andrew Solomon  
is executive director  
of the Partners in  
Policymaking  
Leadership Institute at  
the Tennessee Council  
on Developmental  
Disabilities.

# Expand Your Horizons at Your Local One-Stop Center

By Julie Huber

**S**o, you want to find the perfect job? However, before you do that, maybe you are interested in taking skills assessment, doing some serious career exploration, or finding out about continuing education in your field. Your local One-Stop Center is just the place for you—whether you are interested in getting a job immediately or taking some time to do career exploration.

The U.S. Department of Labor created One-Stop Centers, also known as Career Centers. These centers are “one-stop shops” for finding employment in today’s ever-changing job market. At a One-Stop Center, you can find everything you need to secure that ideal occupation. Some of the agencies you can find at One-Stop Centers include:

- Employment Security
- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Institutions of Higher Education

Some of the services offered at One-Stops include:

- Skill inventories/assessments
- Linkages to training programs
- Services for dislocated workers
- Access to Internet job listings
- Free employment-related copy and fax services
- Workshops such as resumé writing, job search techniques, and interviewing skills

The services in the One-Stop Center are free and available to anyone. To find the One-Stop Center nearest to you, visit [www.state.tn.us/labor-wfd/wherecc2.html](http://www.state.tn.us/labor-wfd/wherecc2.html)

## One-Stop Locations

Below are only some of the locations of the One-Stops throughout the State of Tennessee. This list is not all-inclusive. For more information concerning the One-Stop in your area, contact the Tennessee Department of Labor & Workforce Development or your closest One-Stop Center.

Local Workforce Investment Area One  
Location: Johnson City

### **Northeast Tennessee Career Center**

2515 Wesley Street  
Johnson City, Tennessee 37601  
Phone: (423) 610-0222  
Fax: (423) 610-0078  
[www.ab-t.org](http://www.ab-t.org)

Local Workforce Investment Area Two  
Location: Morristown

### **Five Rivers Regional Career Center**

Alpha Square, Suite 6A  
6057 West Andrew Johnson Highway  
Talbott, Tennessee 37877  
Phone: (423) 317-1060  
Fax: (423) 317-1061

Local Workforce Investment Area Three  
Location: Knoxville

### **Knoxville Area Career Center**

3929 Western Avenue  
Knoxville, Tennessee 37921  
Phone: (865) 522-8322  
Fax: (865) 522-9190

Local Workforce Investment Area Four  
Location: Crossville

### **Tennessee River Valley Career Center**

60 Ridley Street  
Crossville, Tennessee 38555  
Phone: (931) 484-7456  
Fax: (931) 456-5691



Local Workforce Investment Area Five  
Location: Chattanooga

**Southeast Career Center**

Eastgate Town Center  
5600 Brainerd Road, Suite B-18  
Chattanooga, Tennessee 37411  
Phone: (423) 894-5354  
Fax: (423) 894-6639  
[www.secareercenter.org](http://www.secareercenter.org)

Local Workforce Investment Area Five  
Location: Athens

**Athens Area Career Center**

Parkway Plaza  
901 North Congress Parkway  
P.O. Box 949  
Athens, Tennessee 37371-0949  
Phone: (423) 745-2028  
Fax: (423) 745-0938

Local Workforce Investment Area Six  
Location: Tullahoma

**Mid-South Career Center**

111 East Lincoln Street  
P. O. Box 998  
Tullahoma, Tennessee 37388-0998  
Phone: (931) 454-1905  
Fax: (931) 454-1911

Local Workforce Investment Area Seven  
Location: Cookeville

**Upper Cumberland Career Center**

*(future permanent site)*  
3300 Williams Enterprise Drive  
Cookeville, Tennessee 38506  
Phone: (931) 520-8733  
Fax: (931) 520-0651  
*(Center is temporarily located at  
263 West Spring Street, Cookeville,  
38501-3268)*

Local Workforce Investment Area Eight  
Location: Clarksville

**Clarksville-Montgomery County  
Career Center**

Veteran's Plaza  
350 Pageant Lane, Suite 406  
Clarksville, Tennessee 37041  
Phone: (931) 551-9737  
Fax: (931) 551-9108  
[www.clarkvillecareerctr.com](http://www.clarkvillecareerctr.com)

Local Workforce Investment Area Nine  
Location: Nashville

**Middle Tennessee Career Center**

Metro Center  
621 Mainstream Drive, Suite 210  
Nashville, Tennessee 37228  
Phone: (615) 862-8890  
Fax: (615) 862-8910  
[www.careeradvancement.org](http://www.careeradvancement.org)

Local Workforce Investment Area Ten  
Location: Columbia

**South Central Tennessee Career Center**

119 Nashville Highway, Suite 106  
Northway Shopping Center  
Columbia, Tennessee 38401  
Phone: (931) 490-3800  
Fax: (931) 490-3880

Local Workforce Investment Area Eleven  
Location: Jackson

**West Tennessee Career Center**

416 East Lafayette Street  
P. O. Box 758  
Jackson, Tennessee 38302-0758  
Phone: (731) 423-5860  
Fax: (731) 423-5864

Local Workforce Investment Area Twelve  
Location: Dyersburg

**Northwest Career Center**

439 McGaughey Street  
P. O. Box 565  
Dyersburg, Tennessee 38025-0565  
Phone: (731) 286-8300  
Fax: (731) 286-8354

Local Workforce Investment Area Thirteen  
Location: Memphis

**Memphis Area Career Center**

444 North Main Street, 2nd Floor  
Memphis Area Transit Authority Terminal  
Memphis, Tennessee 38103  
Phone: (901) 545-2240  
Fax: (901) 545-2250  
[www.maccwins.com](http://www.maccwins.com) ■

# Council on Developmental Disabilities Funds New Projects on Self-Determination and Quality of Life in the Community

*By Council Staff*

**T**he Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities awarded two new grants on self-determination and quality of life that began July 1, 2001.

## Tennessee Microboards

One grant is to develop materials and provide technical assistance to groups that want to establish microboards for people with developmental disabilities. The concept of a microboard was described in the April 2001 issue of *Breaking Ground*. In a nutshell, a microboard allows a person receiving comprehensive services, or their representative, maximum involvement in the delivery of services. The microboard allows direct control over financial resources. Also, the microboard has responsibility for the implementation and outcomes of the services provided.

Tony Records and Associates (TRA) of Bethesda, Maryland, will administer the grant. The project director of Tennessee Microboards is Ruthie-Marie Beckwith, Ph.D. Dr. Beckwith is the senior research policy analyst with TRA and has a long history as an advocate for individuals with developmental disabilities in Tennessee. Dr. Beckwith was the founder and for fifteen years served as the staff advisor of People First of Tennessee, Inc., a statewide disability rights organization run entirely by people with disabilities.

The vision of Tennessee Microboards is to lay the foundation for a network of well-informed leaders who are dedicated to supporting individuals with disabilities as they attain their dream of the future.

The Tennessee Microboards project is an effort to afford Tennesseans with disabilities the opportunity to live self-directed lives. The project will train potential Microboard members, provide technical assistance to groups in the process of establishing Microboards, and produce information and materials for use in supporting an individual with a disability in the community of their choice.

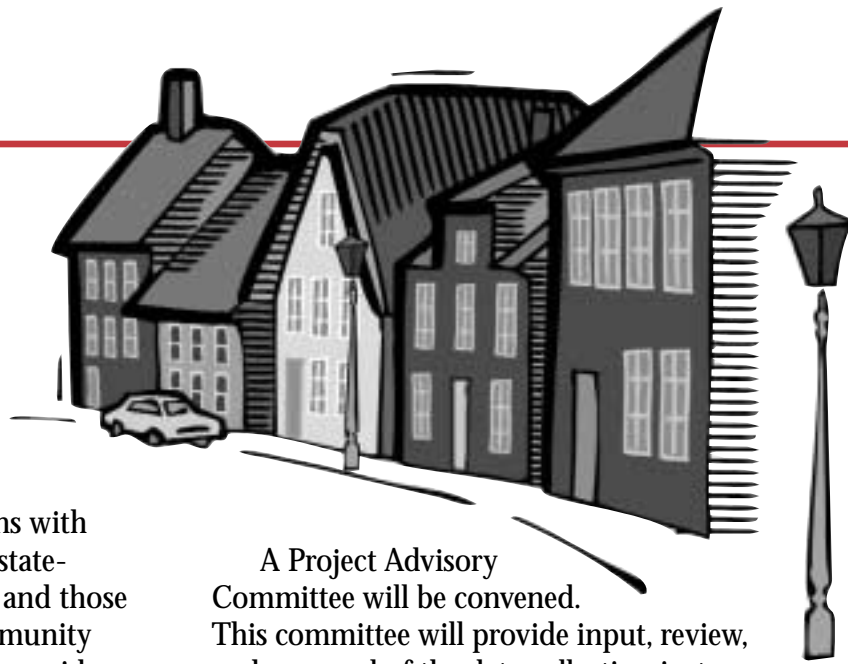
Outcomes of the project will include:

- a series of Microboard training manuals,
- training for members of an Advisory Board and at least twenty other interested persons
- a pilot Microboard
- a statewide Microboard conference
- a Microboard web site.

## Transition Quality Tracking Project

A second grant is to generate data about people who leave developmental centers to live in the community.

The Center for Outcome Analysis, Inc. of Naberth, Pennsylvania, will conduct a five-year, longitudinal evaluation of the impact of the Remedial Order and



Settlement Agreement on persons with disabilities living in Tennessee's state-operated developmental centers and those who have transitioned into community placements. The evaluation will provide consistent quantitative and qualitative feedback about the experiences of individuals and their families.

The vision of the Transition Quality Tracking Project is to collect data that will allow an answer to the question: "Are people better off than they were in 2001?" and also to be able to say "How much better off, in what ways, at what costs, and how do these outcomes compare to other states?"

Under the direction of James W. Conroy, Ph.D., a pioneer in the evaluation of the quality of life of individuals with disabilities, outcomes of the project will include:

- a written report summarizing all research findings and recommendations,
- annual PowerPoint presentations summarizing research findings for stakeholder groups in each Grand Division,
- annual policy reports to relate findings-to-date to the values and principles of the Remedial Order and Settlement Agreement and
- special topic reports as identified over the course of the project.

Key elements to the success of the Transition Quality Tracking Project will occur even before data is collected.

A Project Advisory Committee will be convened. This committee will provide input, review, and approval of the data collection instrument to be used in Tennessee; will review, and approve the training curriculum for data collectors; and will attend the training sessions for the data collectors.

At least one meeting with pertinent stakeholders, including members of the Parent Guardian Associations in Tennessee, will be held to identify concerns about the process of the longitudinal study.

Both of these grants are unique undertakings, and the Council will be working closely with both organizations to assure quality programs.

If you are interested in more information about the new grants, please contact

Tennessee Microboards Project:

**Ruthie-Marie Beckwith, Ph.D.**

1509 VanCleve Lane

Murfreesboro, TN 37129

Phone: 615-898-0300

Fax: 615-904-0308

e-mail: [empfanatic@aol.com](mailto:empfanatic@aol.com)

Transition Quality Tracking Project:

**Amanda Fullerton**

The Center for Outcome Analysis, Inc.

201 Sabine Avenue

Narberth, PA 19072

Phone: 610-668-9001

Fax: 610-668-9002

e-mail: [Aamndful@aol.com](mailto:Aamndful@aol.com) ■

# Project 'Access Knoxville' Makes Strides

By Stephanie Brewer

On Monday, April 16, 2001, Mayor Victor Ashe of Knoxville addressed an audience of approximately 30 people in the downtown Hilton and sang the praises of Project Access Knoxville. Among those in attendance were representatives of the Knoxville City Council, staff and board members of the Disability Resource Center (DRC), several citizens with disabilities, and many members of the local media. What was all the fuss about? It was a celebration of the success of Project Access Knoxville (also known as PAK).

What is PAK, you ask? PAK is an innovative project aimed at increasing access, removing attitudinal barriers, and promoting full inclusion of people with disabilities in the downtown Knoxville area.

How does PAK achieve this? Since 1998 PAK has been the vehicle for the downtown area by talking to business owners about ways to improve access to facilities that weren't yet accessible. In addition, staff members of the DRC and the City of Knoxville have made presentations to several architectural and engineering firms concerning universal access. The result of these activities have led to increased disability awareness and improved access through technical assistance provided by DRC staff.

PAK is essentially a unique partnership between the DRC (Knoxville's Independent Living Center) and the City of Knoxville. It is unique in that these two entities work hand in hand to bring about positive



Stephanie Brewer (right) is director of the Disability Resource Center.

change and increased accessibility, to afford total inclusion to Knoxvilleans with disabilities. PAK is advised by a group of people who represent the disability community, local government, and business people. The council meets regularly to advise staff on goals for PAK.

PAK is funded by the Council on Developmental Disabilities and the City of Knoxville. It was originally designed as a three-year pilot project, with the hopes that it would be extended to continue to promote full inclusion of people with disabilities. I am proud to say that the City of Knoxville has committed to funding PAK for a fourth year.

Why should I feel proud? Because where PAK is concerned, I wear many different hats. I am a policy analyst with the City of Knoxville's Department of Administration and I handle disability-related issues for the



City. In addition, I am a board member with both the Council on Developmental Disabilities and the Disability Resource Center. The success of PAK is personally important to me for these reasons, but none more so than the fact that its existence greatly improves the lives of people with disabilities, another category to which I belong.

You should feel proud, too. Proud that the Council on Developmental Disabilities recognized a unique opportunity to join the disability community and the local government to work toward the same goal: to increase access and positively impact the lives of people with disabilities. As a result of this partnership, many members of private industry have been educated about access and have joined the team to assure that people with disabilities are afforded the opportunity to participate more fully in society. In addition, everyone involved is learning that access benefits us all; if not each of us directly, then it benefits our friends, family members, coworkers, or potential customers. With the bringing down of physical and attitudinal barriers,

people with disabilities are better able to pursue with dignity all of their life's goals: from being consumers to becoming homeowners, from getting an education to becoming employed, and being able to shop where one chooses to shop. Through the success of projects such as PAK, equality is truly on the horizon.

Besides congratulating the participants of Project Access Knoxville on its success and thanking them for helping to make Knoxville more accessible, Mayor Ashe also unveiled a sticker that will be placed at the entrance to

**To learn more about PAK or to learn how to implement a similar project in your area, please call the Disability Resource Center at (865) 637-3666.**



Knoxville Mayor Victor Ashe (back to camera) greets PAK participants.

disability-friendly businesses in the downtown area. This sticker carries the "PAK seal of approval" and means that people with disabilities will know that a business meets a minimum of accessibility criteria. So if you're ever in Knoxville, take a trip downtown and visit one of the many businesses

displaying this sticker. And make sure you tell them that you're proud of them. ■

Stephanie Brewer  
is director of  
the Disability  
Resource Center.

# Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute Graduates 8th Class

*By Ned Andrew Solomon*

**O**n April 7 at the Maxwell House Hotel in Nashville, the eighth annual Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute classmates picked up their diplomas, smiled for the cameras, and joined their family members who had come to celebrate their accomplishment. It was a festive weekend, with a photo workshop, a seminar on being silly and the importance of laughing an average of 15 times a day, and a call from a former Partners participant and a former Partners director to march into the future, armed with the leadership qualities and advocacy skills

instilled by the program.

I was especially proud, since it was my first year as director of Partners. Actually, not even a full year in the position, so I need to give grateful thanks

to former director Kevin Wright, and Council staff member Alicia Cone for leading the classes until I was lucky enough to be hired!

If you are not familiar with Partners, you should be! The Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute is a training initiative of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. The Institute is designed to provide adults with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities with the latest information on disability policy issues, and to help them become more confident in their ability to advocate for themselves and others. The ultimate goal is to create a productive

partnership between people with disabilities and the people who make the policies that affect their lives, and the lives of their loved ones.

The curriculum, during seven weekend sessions, includes state and federal laws, assistive technology, community inclusion, personal futures planning, employment, history of disability, supported living and family supports. With every new class, and especially during our February reunion weekend, we try to incorporate topics that are currently relevant to our class members. All of our sessions are conducted by local and national experts in the field of disability.

Each year, a class of 25-30 participants is selected from across the state. To recruit the class, I distribute flyers and applications throughout the state, by mail, by e-mail, and by making these items available at meetings, conferences, and workshops related to disability issues. I also contact advocacy agencies statewide and rely heavily on the word of mouth network of the current Partners class and Partners graduates since 1993.

The highlight of our graduation weekend came on Saturday, when each Partner had an opportunity to address the entire class for one last time. In many cases, we witnessed testimonies from individuals who entered the program to better handle their own personal or family situations, and wound up branching out into their communities to advocate for others with disabilities. I guess they took the leadership part of our program title to heart! I don't think there were any dry eyes in the room after that emotional session.

**The ultimate goal is to create a productive partnership between people with disabilities and the people who make the policies that affect their lives, and the lives of their loved ones.**



I am currently in the process of selecting the 2001-02 class from a large pile of applications from across the state. I am looking forward to another great year with a new group of community leaders. This year our operation will be moving to the Doubletree Hotel in downtown Nashville, within walking and door knocking distance of the legislators we hope to partner with in the future.

If you are interested in getting more information about PIP or an application for the 2002 Partners program, please contact

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# Finding a Path—A “One-Stop” Web Site for Tennesseans with Disabilities

By Jan Rosemergy

**O**ftentimes people with disabilities or family members talk about the experience of having a disability as a journey to an unexpected place. So if having a disability is a journey, then finding one's way through the service system too often is like being lost in a forest. Which way should you go?

Tennessee Family Pathfinder is an Internet web site that provides a “map” for traveling Tennessee's disability service system. It's like driving on an Interstate

highway and stopping at the State Welcome Center when you cross a state border. It's a single stop where you can get the most important information you need.

Where is it located?

The Internet address is [www.familypathfinder.org](http://www.familypathfinder.org).

Set a “bookmark” so you can return there easily.

What do you find there?

The topics (in alphabetical order) are listed at left.

For each of these topics, you will find information on Tennessee service providers and resources, as well as national information sources. In some cases, you will find brief articles to advise you—for example, the process of obtaining

special education services for your child.

In a few cases, the topic links you to other sites. “Library” links you to the Family Village Library, which has information on over 400 types of disabilities. “Training” links you to the Tennessee Disability Training Network, where you can find information on training and other disability-related events in your area of the state. By December 2001, “Tennessee Disability Services” will allow you to search all the service information in the 2001 Statewide Directory of Disability Services and Supports.

Our philosophy is not to try to include everything—or else you'd be lost in that “forest” of information. Instead we try to include the places where you enter the service system, or those places that are the most complete sources of information on a particular topic.

If you're new to using Internet sites, on Pathfinder's home page click on “Help on Navigating the Internet.”

What about people who don't have computers? Tennessee's public libraries do have computers with Internet access. If you need help, ask a librarian; they are trained to assist you.

The Tennessee Family Pathfinder Project is a family support model demonstration project funded by a grant from the Administration on Developmental Disabilities to the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. Tennessee's

## Topics:

Advocacy and Law  
Assistive Technology  
Child Care  
Education (Birth to Adult)  
Employment  
Family Support  
Health Care  
Houses of Worship  
Housing  
Independent Living  
Information and Referral  
Library  
Mental Health (*coming soon*)  
News  
Post Office  
Respite Care  
Tennessee Disability Services  
Training  
Transportation







Statewide Family Support Council serves as our Advisory Committee.

The Pathfinder Project involves two major activities. The first is outreach to persons with disabilities and family members who live in the Nashville or Memphis Enterprise Communities and Hispanic families, with activities developed and led by staff from IAM CARES and the Council. The second activity is the Pathfinder web site. It is being developed by staff from the John F. Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development at Vanderbilt University and Council staff.

The Pathfinder site began in January 2001. Throughout the year, we are asking for advice from people around the state on how to improve each section. After persons with disabilities, family members, and professionals with expertise on each topic advise us, we revise that section. The site will be complete in January 2002, although we will continue to update the site as needed.

You can help us in several ways. First, you can visit the site and explore it—and send us your ideas for improving it. To do this, e-mail [jan.rosemergy@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:jan.rosemergy@vanderbilt.edu) (this address is on the Pathfinder site). An evaluation will soon be added to the site, as well. Second, you can tell others about it. We have brochures we can send you to give to others. If you work for a disability-related agency that has a web site, or if you are a member of a disability group that has a web site, that site could link to Pathfinder.

As Roy Rogers and Dale Evans always said, “Happy trails to you!” We hope Pathfinder will provide a “happy trail.” ■

Jan Rosemergy is director of communication and community relations at the John F. Kennedy Center, Vanderbilt University.



# Payment System of Mental Health Services Under Review

*By Donna Allen*

Since October 2000, an Advisory Group of individuals representing family members, advocacy groups, service providers, Independent Support Coordinator (ISC) agencies, and Division of Mental Retardation Services (DMRS) staff has been meeting to develop recommendations for simplifying and restructuring the system of payments for services funded by the Division.

One of the recommendations of the group was to pilot test a rate structure based on an assessment of the level of need for supports of the individuals we serve. The group researched the various assessment instruments being used in other states and selected the one that was most consistent with Tennessee's philosophy and that had the highest reliability and validity. The instrument selected is the North Carolina SNAP. It was developed by the Murdoch Center at the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and is being used in North Carolina as well as several other states. The SNAP results in one of five levels of needed supports in the areas of Daily Living, Health Care, and Behavior. For purposes of the pilot project, these levels will be associated with a level of reimbursement for residential, day, and other support services.

A second recommendation to be pilot tested is increased flexibility in several areas. Individuals will have greater flexibility for use of their approved supports budget and to use nontraditional providers hired and trained by them and their families or representatives. Providers will have greater flexibility in staffing patterns for the residential and day services they provide. Circles of Support and ISCs will have greater control over approved funding and less paperwork and delay related to Service Plans.

The project began on March 19, 2001, with training by staff from the Murdoch Center. A group of twenty individuals from ISC Agencies and DMRS were trained to be trainers for others who will be examiners, that is, who will administer the SNAP to individuals. On the following day, the Murdoch Center staff trained a group of ISC and DMRS staff to be examiners. On the third day, the Murdoch Center staff held a forum open to any stakeholders to provide information about the SNAP.

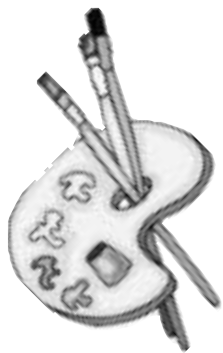
Beginning in April, assessments of the individuals who have agreed to participate in the pilot project were conducted by the trained examiners. The results of the assessments will then be compared by DMRS consultants to current reimbursement rates and staffing patterns and to the actual costs reported by service providers. Rates for each of the five levels for residential and day services, and a budget for support services, will then be developed by the Advisory Group. Beginning on July 1, 2001, the new rate structure and increased flexibility will be applied to the agencies and individuals participating in the pilot project. Evaluations of the success of the structure will be measured throughout the project and recommendations for any necessary modifications made prior to statewide implementation on July 1, 2002.

Questions about the pilot programs?  
Contact

## **Donna Allen**

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Donna Allen is director of planning and development for the Division of Mental Retardation Services.



# Share Your Art

Inviting you or those you work with to contribute to the annual *Breaking Ground Arts Issue*

*Coming in August 2001*

Do you write short stories or poetry? Do you paint, draw, or take pictures? Then we'd like to see your work for possible publication! The editor will consider

- fiction up to 1,000 words and poems, whether traditionalist or modern
- photos, drawings, and cartoons, which can include people and be about humorous or serious subjects. This material must reproduce well in black-and-white
- personal essays

Work with disability themes is preferred, and contributions by persons with disabilities are especially sought.

We'll give contributors a prominent by-line, a biographical note, and copies of the issue.

Please address your submissions to  
Editor, *Breaking Ground*  
Vanderbilt University  
Peabody Box 40  
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Nashville, Tennessee 37203-5701

Questions? Just call (615) 322-8473 or 1-800-288-0403  
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Editor: Mr. Jim Summerville  
Contributing Editor: Dr. Jan Rosemergy

## About the Council:

The Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities provides leadership to ensure independence, productivity, integration, and inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the community through promotion of systems change.

The editor will consider for publication original contributions, including news and feature stories, short fiction, poetry, artwork, and photographs but reserves the right to edit or decline publication. Brief letters to the editor are also welcome. Opinions expressed in any published matter are the author's and not necessarily those of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities or its staff.

This free publication is produced six times a year by the John F. Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development at Vanderbilt University. Subscription requests, change of address, and submissions for possible publication should be directed to the Editor, *Breaking Ground*, Vanderbilt University, Peabody Box 40, Nashville, Tennessee 37203. Telephone (615) 322-8473 or 1-800-288-0403; TDD (615) 343-3330 or 1-800-288-3311; FAX (615) 322-8236. E-mail: [Jim.Summerville@Vanderbilt.edu](mailto:Jim.Summerville@Vanderbilt.edu)

Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities Grant Number 1-03999-1-0. Authorization Number 339371, July 2001. 5,600 copies. This public document was promulgated at a cost of \$.46 per copy.



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